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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups

International Year of Older Persons and follow-up arrangements

Note by the Secretary-General

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Introduction

1. In accordance with previous decisions of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission for Social Development, the Commission will consider, under item 3 (b) of the agenda of its thirty-seventh session, issues pertaining to ageing, in particular the International Year of Older Persons (1999).

2. The Commission for Social Development, in its resolution 35/1,[1] invited the Secretary-General to make recommendations on different options for the future review and appraisal of the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing,[2] and to report to the Commission at its next session. At its thirty-sixth session, the Commission took note of the report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.5/1998/3), entitled "Options for the future review and appraisal of the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing". In its decision 36/101,[3] the Commission requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its thirty-seventh session a report on action taken to implement this decision and on further possible options for substantially improving the reliability, validity and practicability of the current review and appraisal exercise, focusing in particular on priorities identified in ongoing preparatory discussions for the International Year of Older Persons.

3. The present note includes suggestions for the development of a long-term perspective strategy on ageing into the twenty-first century; streamlining the review and appraisal of the International Plan of Action on Ageing; and the four plenary meetings of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session to be devoted to follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons.

I. Towards a long-term perspective strategy on ageing into the twenty-first century

4. The report of the Secretary-General on the conceptual framework of a programme for the preparation and observance of the International Year of Older Persons (A/50/114) put forward the theme "Towards a society for all ages" and suggested four dimensions for exploring such a society: the situation of older persons; lifelong individual development; multigenerational relationships; and the interplay of population ageing and development. Subsequently, in his report on the operational framework for the Year (A/52/328), the Secretary-General informed Member States that the feasibility of formulating a long-term perspective strategy on ageing to the year 2020 was being explored by the Secretariat.

5. In its resolution 52/80 of 12 December 1997, the General Assembly encouraged States, with the support of United Nations organizations, bodies and programmes and of non-governmental organizations, to formulate policies and programmes on ageing so as to promote a society for all ages. Furthermore, in his report on the preparations for the International Year of Older Persons (A/53/294), the Secretary-General suggested that the General Assembly might wish to invite national committees to consider implementing practical strategies towards a society for all ages aimed at mainstreaming ageing into policies and programmes.

6. The future perspective strategy has a solid foundation in the work of the United Nations on ageing. It includes the most significant international instrument on ageing, the International Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted by the World Assembly on Ageing in 1982, and endorsed the same year by the General Assembly. The continuing interest of the international community in the issue of ageing has been demonstrated by a series of General Assembly actions in the 1990s. On 16 December 1991, the General Assembly, in its resolution 46/91, adopted the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, contained in the annex thereto; subsequently, in 1992, the General Assembly held a two-day special session and adopted, in its resolution 47/86 of 16 December 1992, the global targets on ageing for the year 2001 (A/47/339, sect. III). The targets are a set of practical objectives designed to assist Governments and non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the Plan of Action. At the same session, the General Assembly also adopted the Proclamation on Ageing (resolution 47/5 of 16 October 1992, annex), in which, among other things, the General Assembly decided to observe the year 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. Finally, in preparation for the Year, the General Assembly considered the conceptual and operational frameworks.

7. All these international consensus documents on ageing are based on the International Plan of Action on Ageing, and could therefore be considered an extension of its conceptual premises, which include both individual and population ageing, and address the humanitarian and developmental aspects of ageing. The Plan of Action emphasizes the lifelong nature of ageing and calls for a general policy of prevention. It also promotes an age-integrated society, which forms the basis of the society for all ages. However, it is clear that the Plan of Action's recommendations have a clearly defined focus on the situation of older persons. While

this is a valid approach, additional policy avenues are required to move towards a society for all ages.

8. Therefore, as suggested in document E/CN.5/1998/3, while the primary focus of the International Plan of Action on Ageing on the situation of older persons was maintained, complementary strategies based on the four dimensions of a society for all ages could be added. This would be achieved through the elaboration of the long-term perspective strategy on ageing. Such a strategy would take an age group and sectorally integrated approach, originating from the concept of a society for all ages. It may be elaborated from many perspectives. One of them has been explored by the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. It is based on the individual life course and that of the social micro-environment of family, neighbourhood and communities of interest, as well as the macrosocial (macro-societal) environment. The essence of such an approach is double-faceted. First, there is facilitation of individual development into late life, with this facilitation focusing on self-help and independence. Second, there is strengthening of the enabling micro-environments of families, neighbourhoods and communities of interest, as well as of societal institutions, incorporating both individual and institutional approaches. Priority areas (themes) within this perspective could then be selected for each review and appraisal exercise (proposed for every five years) by the Commission for Social Development.

9. Several important initiatives of the United Nations Secretariat are planned to support the development of the future perspective strategy on ageing, including the Research Agenda on Ageing for the twenty-first century, an interregional expert group meeting on policies for a society for all ages, and other meetings.

10. The General Assembly, in its resolution 53/109 of 9 December 1998, recommended that research agendas for the next decades address the socio-economic adjustments required to move towards a society for all ages, and requested the United Nations programme on ageing to give priority attention to the research needs of developing countries. As reported in document A/53/294, the first phase of the research agenda on ageing for the next century is under way, with an initial expert group meeting scheduled for 1–3 February 1999. An interactive Web site has been established on the Internet, with a closed discussion area for the use of meeting participants in exchanging pre-meeting ideas. The ongoing outputs of the research agenda will also contribute to the long-term perspective strategy on ageing, as will the Interregional Expert Group Meeting on Policies for a Society for All Ages, to be held in mid-1999 in Bangkok, and other expert group meetings in the pipeline.

II. Options to improve the review and appraisal of the International Plan of Action on Ageing

11. The limitations of the current review and appraisal exercise of the International Plan of Action on Ageing and the need for a new approach were detailed in the report of the Secretary-General to the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-sixth session (E/CN.5/1998/3). Factors noted included the low response rate to the questionnaire by Member States, and problems in respect of the interpretation of questions by Member States which make it difficult to produce comparable data. In the same report, the Secretary-General proposed that the review and appraisal exercise of the Plan of Action be undertaken every five years, in conjunction with the publication of the World Ageing Situation report. A more focused exercise was suggested, specifically to gather information from Member States on selected priority areas, which would be chosen by the Commission in advance. These priority areas could be linked to the future long-term perspective strategy on ageing, as elaborated in paragraph 8 of this note.

12. Two other initiatives are under way that will serve to support the review and appraisal of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, as well as the future long-term perspective strategy. The Government of the Netherlands is providing the programme on ageing with the support of professional and technical staff from the Department of Sociology and Social Gerontology of the Free University of Amsterdam for the purpose of establishing a database on policies and programmes on ageing. It is proposed that the database will be Internet-accessible. The objectives are to provide Member States with on-line information on available public policy responses to population and individual ageing; to assemble a compendium of successful policies and programmes; and to contribute to the future strategy on ageing. It is also envisaged that the ongoing process of gathering and updating policy information from Member States will serve to assist in the monitoring of the implementation of the Plan of Action.

13. As requested by the Commission, the Secretariat further explored the idea of including an ageing-related development index in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Human Development Report*. A meeting of the Ad hoc Informal Support Group for the International Year of Older Persons, held in May 1998, was devoted to discussion of this issue with responsible officials of UNDP, the United Nations Statistics Division, the Population Division of the United Nations Secretariat, and the Division

for the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. It was decided at that time that, owing to a lack of sufficient basic data in many countries, the introduction of an ageing-related index would be premature.

III. Plenary meetings at the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly

14. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/80, four plenary meetings of the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session will be devoted to the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons, which should take place at an appropriate global policy-making level. This will provide an opportunity to review both the promotional and substantive observance of the Year, and to present an outline of the future long-term perspective strategy on ageing. It is envisaged that Member States will report on the national observance of the Year, discuss national policy approaches towards a society for all ages, and present best practices at the national and local levels.

IV. Conclusion

15. At its thirty-seventh session, the Commission may wish to comment on the following proposals in the light of preparation for the International Year of Older Persons and beyond:

(a) A future long-term perspective strategy on ageing;

(b) A consolidated approach to the review and appraisal of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, which will employ a focused inquiry among Governments, and the creation and maintenance of a policy database;

(c) Organization of the four plenary meetings at the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

Notes

[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 6* (E/1997/26), chap. I, sect. D, resolution 35/1.

[2] *Report of the World Assembly on Ageing, Vienna, 26 July to 6 August 1982* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.82.I.16), chap. VI, sect. A.

[3] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1998, Supplement No. 6* (E/1998/26), chap. I, sect. B, decision 36/101.